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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 AMMAN 000468

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PREL](#) [IZ](#) [JO](#)

SUBJECT: OUT-OF-COUNTRY VOTING OFF TO SLOW START

REF: A. AMMAN 342

[B](#). AMMAN 293

Classified By: CDA David Hale for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d)

SUMMARY

[1](#). (SBU) Out-of-country (OCV) voter registration for Iraqis in Jordan has to date proceeded smoothly. Registration sites have had ample security and more than adequate staff to register voters and answer questions. Turnout, however, has been low, with only 710 Iraqis (out of an estimated 200,000 eligible voters in Jordan) registering on the first day of the week-long registration period. Special registration procedures have been approved by the Independent Electoral Commission for Iraq (IECI) for Iraqi police cadets in Jordan for training, but the names of new police trainees scheduled to arrive next week are needed by the IECI as soon as possible if they are to be allowed to vote. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) is continuing its voter outreach efforts and has established a 24-hour phone bank and operations center at the OCV headquarters in Amman to handle inquiries from around the world and to diffuse potential problems. IOM officials acknowledge that frustration among Iraqis over the lack of information on candidates may be dissuading some from registering. End Summary.

OCV CENTERS OPEN AND RUNNING

[2](#). (U) PolOff paid an unannounced visit January 17, the first day of voter registration for Iraqis, to three of the eight OCV centers in Amman, located in schools. Security was good. At each location there were a half-dozen uniformed military guards patrolling the school perimeter while numerous contract security personnel (including women) staffed the entrance and interior. All persons wishing to enter for any reason were required to undergo a metal detector sweep. Each center was headed by a helpful and well-informed director, aided by a "manager" for each room containing multiple registration tables. All non-security staff were Iraqi. The center in the upscale Sweifiya neighborhood had eight registration rooms with four tables each, while the other two centers visited had twelve rooms. (NOTE: The largest center in Amman has sixteen registration rooms. End note.)

[3](#). (C) The directors of all three centers reported no problems, though a few registrants were turned away because they could present only an Iraqi passport without the required second form of identification. All the directors noted, however, that turnout was lower than they had expected. PolOff observed the most activity (and the most stylishly-dressed registrants) at the center in Sweifiya. The director of this center told PolOff that "about 100" persons had come to register as of 3:00 PM, adding that she believed this was higher than the number of registrants at most other centers. She speculated that Iraqis in this well-to-do area were more inclined to vote as they tended to be more educated and had no concerns about their residency status in Jordan. In contrast, a center in poorer East Amman reported only about 45 registrants two hours before closing for the day.

IOM OFFICIALS CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC

[4](#). (C) PolOff met January 18 with Richard Scott (OCV project manager) and Monique DeGroot (OCV director for external relations) at the IOM's OCV headquarters in Amman to discuss the voter registration process. They said there had been no major problems in Jordan (or in any of the other 14 participating countries) and commented that they were generally pleased with the over 1,000 local Iraqis they had hired to staff the registration centers. According to Scott, the GOJ agreed to allow the IOM to hire Iraqis for these jobs without possessing a valid Jordanian work permit. Security was by far the IOM's biggest concern, followed by possible

vote fraud, which had prompted a crash course for all registration personnel in detecting altered documents. Scott and DeGroot acknowledged that there were rumors that some former Baathists had "infiltrated" the OCV workforce to intimidate prospective voters, but firmly stated that any employee found making threats or disrupting operations would be dismissed immediately. (NOTE: Despite this demurral, one Iraqi source within IOM's management told us privately that some apparent infiltrators have already been uncovered and dismissed. End note.)

15. (SBU) When asked about registration turnout, Scott and DeGroot were careful not to make any predictions, but expressed hope that the small numbers of registrants seen January 17 in Jordan would increase later in the week. Official registration counts - for Jordan and all other OCV countries - would be made available via the OCV website or a press announcement following endorsement of the figures by the IECI. (NOTE: DeGroot confirmed to PolOff on January 19 that only 710 Iraqis in Jordan had registered on January 17. OCV registration in Jordan for January 18 rose to 1,192. End note.)

16. (SBU) DeGroot explained that the IOM was continuing its voter education and outreach campaign to boost participation using radio and television advertisements, newspaper announcements, and public banners. Locally-hired Iraqis were also holding community meetings to publicize the elections, though DeGroot was unable to estimate how many Iraqis in Jordan had attended such meetings. To handle telephone inquiries from around the world, the IOM has set up a centralized 24-hour phone bank in Amman, which had to be expanded to accommodate the over 1,200 telephone calls received each day. An operations center staffed around the clock with 25 IOM employees is also housed at the OCV headquarters in Amman to quickly address questions and potential problems flagged by OCV staff worldwide via secure e-mail.

17. (C) Turning to the issue of candidate information, Scott said that he was not sure when the IECI would provide IOM with a list of candidates for distribution. Currently at registration centers Iraqis were only provided with a flyer on "political entities" in Iraq. Both Scott and DeGroot acknowledged that frustration among Iraqis caused by the lack of candidate information may be a factor in dissuading some from registering.

IRAQI POLICE TRAINEES IN JORDAN

18. (SBU) During the January 18 meeting, IOM employees explained to PolOff that special registration procedures had been established for Iraqi police cadets being trained at the INL-funded Jordan International Police Training Center (JIPTC) outside Amman. Since most of these cadets apparently do not have the necessary identification documents to register, the IECI directed the IOM to send them the names and available biographic data for the current class of approximately 1,500 cadets, to be vetted and approved in Baghdad. While this has been successfully accomplished for the cadets currently at JIPTC, allowing all of them to vote, the IOM has not been able to obtain and send to the IECI information on the new class of cadets due to arrive at JIPTC next week. The IOM is concerned that if they do not receive this information shortly, the IECI may not have sufficient time to authorize the incoming police trainees to vote in Jordan.

COMMENT

19. (C) The number of Iraqis who have so far registered in Jordan has been, in DeGroot's own words, "disappointing." The IOM hopes the figures will rise as positive word-of-mouth spreads within the Iraqi community and Iraqi workers are given time off from their jobs during the long Eid Al Adha holiday (January 19-23). Press and anecdotal reports indicate that there is widespread general interest in the election among Iraqis here, and little support for an election boycott. Despite this environment, three factors may be slowing registration. First, the majority of potential Iraqi voters here either entered or have remained in Jordan without authorization; we are hearing that many of them are fearful that registering may expose them to possible punitive action, such as demands for stiff fines, or deportation by GOJ officials. While the MOU signed between the IOM and Jordan provides that the GOJ will take no such action, the IOM's radio and TV ads do not make this point (though it is made in IOM press releases and community meetings). Second, there are rumors within the Iraqi community that those who register are being "watched" by pro-insurgent elements (including alleged infiltrators among the registration staff) and could be targeted for possible

retribution. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, many of our Iraqi contacts (including political candidates who have visited Amman) contend that overall voter education and understanding of the larger political process remains extremely poor. According to these sources and press reports, many local Iraqis are frustrated at the lack of information on the candidates, are not sure what the election is all about, and do not know who to vote for.

MINIMIZE CONSIDERED

HALE